

Field Report

Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site

■ 1.0 Summary

The Richmond National Battlefield Park (RNBP), including the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site (NHS), is located in the City of Richmond and adjacent areas of Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico Counties, Virginia. The purpose of the Park is to “to protect the Civil War battlefield resources associated with the struggle for the capital of the Confederacy and to interpret these resources so as to foster an understanding of their larger significance.” The Park consists of 10 separate units plus the Park’s Visitor Center. The Park encompasses a total of 763 acres of land spread across a total land area of approximately 132 square miles in three counties and the City of Richmond. A complete tour of the Park involves a 130-kilometer (80-mile) drive. The Park units are associated with both the 1862 campaign of Union General George B. McClellan and the 1864 campaign of Union General Ulysses S. Grant.

Considering the relatively large number of widely dispersed and generally small sites that constitute this Park, it appears that Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) may have only a modest potential to address the transportation and resource conservation issues currently facing the RNBP. There does not appear to be the need for improved internal Park unit circulation for visitors.

However, the potential may exist for ATS to help better link together the various Park units. This could be provided as part of ongoing NPS efforts to interpret the significance of these battlefield sites while possibly reducing on-site parking demands. At the same time, the market for such a service appears to be somewhat limited due to the time and distance involved.

There are also a number of more broadly based development issues facing the Park that are beyond the abilities of ATS to resolve. Continuing suburban residential, commercial and industrial development in Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico Counties is beginning to impinge on Park properties. This clearly has the potential to both negatively impact Park properties and degrade the visitor experience. This issue appears to be one in need of immediate attention.

The ATS potentials identified for this NPS site include the following:

- An expanded NPS Visitor Center as part of the new Park Visitor Information Center being developed on the site of the Tredegar Iron Works will be able to provide improved traveler information;

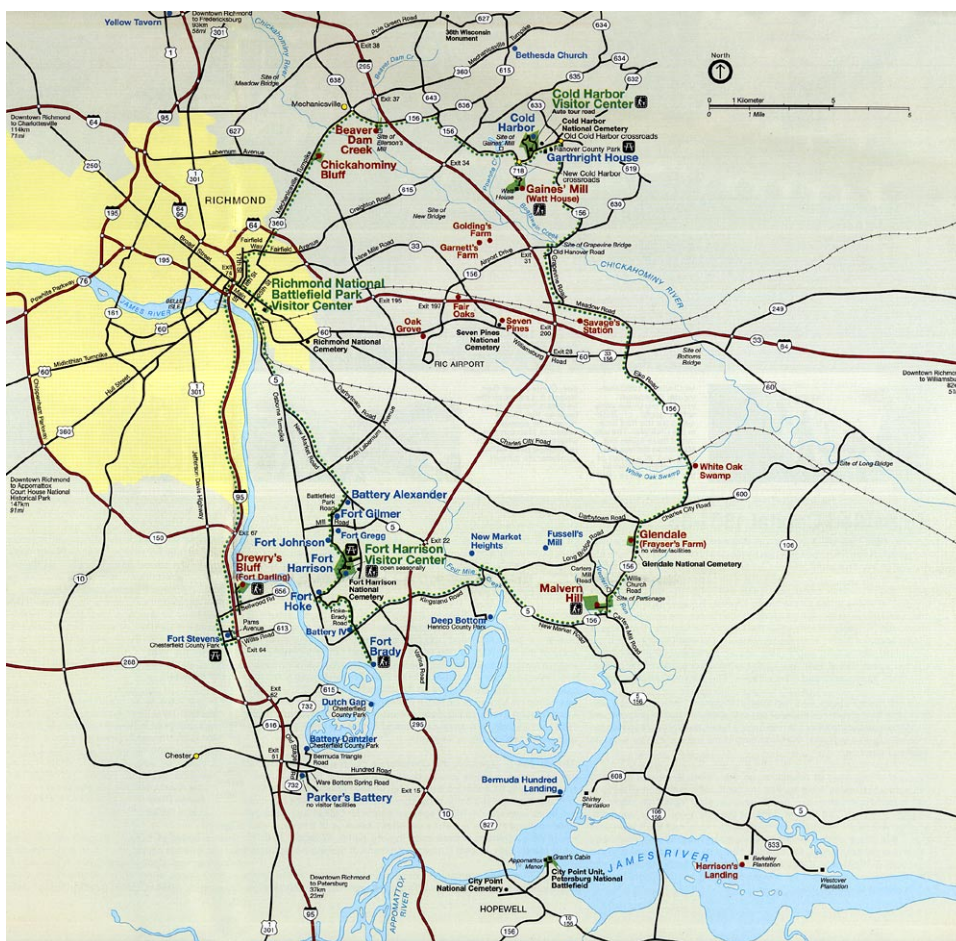
- Collaboration by the NPS with existing public non-profit and private sector tour companies should be pursued to encourage expanded use of these services for day-long tours of the Park units north of the James River; and
- In conjunction with the Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau's downtown area shuttle services, improved transit linkages should be established between the Maggie L. Walker NHS, the current RNBP Visitor Center, and the new regional Visitor Center at the Tredegar Iron Works Site.

■ 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Location

The RNBP (including the Maggie L. Walker NHS) is located in the City of Richmond and adjacent areas of Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico Counties, Virginia (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Regional Location Map



2.2 Administration and Classification

The RBNBP is a multi-unit site administered by the NPS.

2.3 Physical Description

The RBNBP consists of 10 separate units plus the Park Visitor Center. The Park encompasses a total of 763 acres of land spread across a total land area of approximately 132 square miles in three counties and the City of Richmond. A complete tour of the Park involves a 130-kilometer (80-mile) drive. The Park units are associated with both the 1862 campaign of Union General George B. McClellan and the 1864 campaign of Union General Ulysses S. Grant. A listing of the Park units is presented below:

1862 Campaign of General George B. McClellan

- Chickahominy Bluff
- Beaver Dam Creek
- Gaines' Mill (Watt House)
- Glendale (Frayser's Farm)
- Malvern Hill
- Drewry's Bluff

1864 Campaign of General Ulysses S. Grant

- Cold Harbor
- Garthright House
- Fort Harrison and Vicinity
- Parker's Battery

Other battlefields not part of the Park, but which are important to an understanding of McClellan's 1862 campaign are: Seven Pines/Fair Oaks, Oak Grove, Savage's Station, and White Oak Swamp. State historical markers and monuments explain the fighting at these locations.

Several of the Park's battlefield units – Gaines' Mill, Malvern Hill, Cold Harbor, Fort Harrison, Fort Brady, and Drewry's Bluff have short, self-guided walking tours that take visitors past historical features. Picnic facilities are available only at Fort Harrison and the Garthright House. A two-kilometer (1.25-mile) driving tour of the Cold Harbor Battlefield passes by well-preserved trenches that are fine examples of Civil War field fortifications.

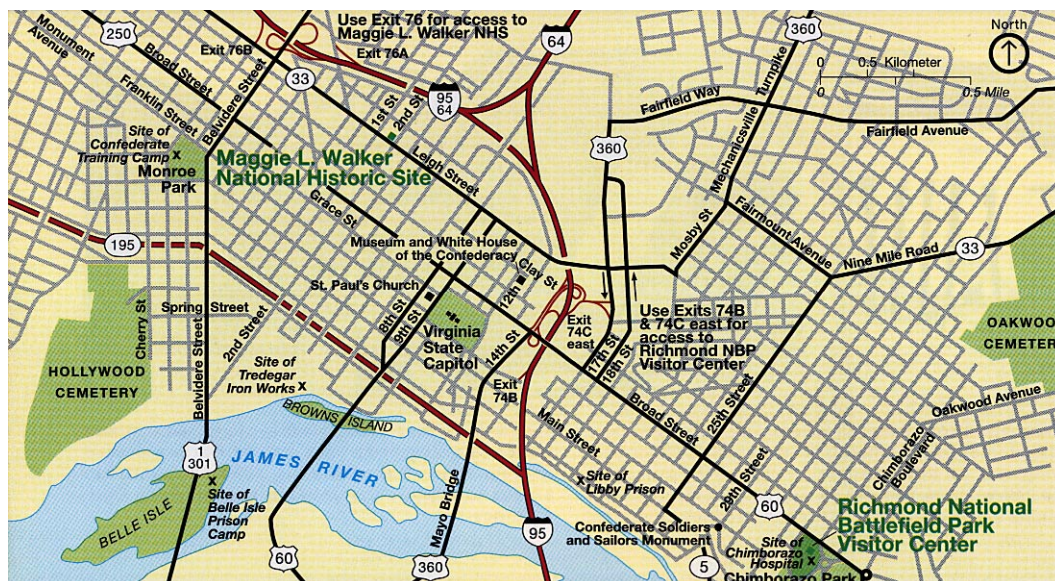
The Park's administrative headquarters and main Visitor Center is located at 3215 East Broad Street in the City of Richmond and is open year-round. The Visitor Center is located on the site of one of the Confederacy's largest hospitals – Chimborazo. This was a massive complex built in 1861 to accommodate the influx of sick and wounded arriving in the Confederate capital daily. This hospital complex treated nearly 76,000 patients during the Civil War. None of the original hospital buildings remain on this site. The Park headquarters and Visitor Center facilities are housed in a 1902 vintage building originally constructed as an observation station for the National Weather Service.

Smaller Visitor Center/contact stations are operated at the Cold Harbor Battlefield, Glendale Cemetery, and Fort Harrison units. Except for Cold Harbor, these sites are attended only during summer months or during special commemorative events. Cold Harbor's Visitor Center is open year-round.

The RBNBP is also responsible for the administration of the Maggie L. Walker NHS located in downtown Richmond. This is one of only three National Historic Sites devoted to an

African-American woman. The site is located in Jackson Ward, one of the nation's largest National Historic Landmark Districts associated with black history and culture (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Downtown Richmond



2.4 Mission and Goals of the National Battlefield Park

The mission and goals of the RBNBP are summarized below in the following excerpts from the current General Management Plan (GMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (1996):

“The March 2, 1936, authorizing act of Congress (49 Stat. 1155) defines the mission of the RBNBP as follows:

“...all such lands, structures, and other property in the military battlefield area or areas of the City of Richmond, Virginia, or within five miles of the city limits of said city or within five miles from the boundary of the present Richmond Battlefield State Park, as shall be designated by the Secretary of the Interior, in the exercise of his discretion as necessary or desirable for National Battlefield Park purposes,...such area or areas shall be, and they are hereby, established, dedicated, and set apart as a public park for the benefit and inspiration of the people and shall be known as the RBNBP.”

“Based on the authorizing legislation, the 1935 Historic Sites Act, and the mandate in the NPS Organic Act of 1916 to preserve, protect, and interpret cultural and natural resources, the following purpose of the RBNBP has been established:

“...to protect the Civil War battlefield resources associated with the struggle for the capital of the Confederacy and to interpret these resources so as to foster an understanding of their larger significance.”

“The following objectives are taken from the “Statement for Management” of the Park, approved in 1989. They reflect the enabling legislation and the long history of commemoration, preservation, and interpretation at Richmond.

“To identify, evaluate, protect, restore and preserve Park cultural resources important to the understanding of the military actions during the 1862 Peninsula Campaign and the 1864 and 1865 battle actions that resulted in the final struggle for Richmond.

“To provide a historical context that will foster public understanding of:

- Battlefield actions during the 1862 Peninsula Campaign and the 1864-1865 battle actions;
- Military strategies of the Union and Confederate forces;
- Life in and around Richmond during the Civil War; and
- The City of Richmond as the social, economic, and political focus during the Civil War.

“To promote the identification and conservation of important Richmond area Civil War battlefields and associated resources not currently in Park ownership, through cooperative federal, state, county and private actions.

“To make all of the units easily available and accessible to the visitor.

“To interpret each site in its overall historical context.”

2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

Traditionally, it has been very difficult to obtain accurate visitation data for this Park. Factors influencing this problem include: the wide geographic dispersal of the Park’s units, the existence of private rights-of-way across Park land, public roads crossing Park lands, the use of Park roadways by commuters and other local residents, and the fact that only the headquarters unit at Chimborazo is staffed year-round. Visitation numbers for Park units other than Chimborazo have been based on spot counting, traffic counters, and statistically adjusted estimates, but inaccurate results have been unavoidable. The double counting of visitors and the inclusion of transient commuter traffic has occurred, particularly since the growth of residential development around a number of the Park units.

The most accurate visitation information has been obtained over the past five to six years in connection with the development of the most recent GMP. Over the period 1994-1998, total Park visitation is estimated to have ranged from a high of 233,392 visitors in 1994 to a

low of 208,750 visitors in 1997. Total annual visitation in 1998 was estimated at 232,803. Annual visitation at the Maggie L. Walker NHS has ranged from a high of 10,362 persons in 1994 (the year of opening) to a low of 8,494 persons in 1997. The total annual visitation at the Maggie L. Walker NHS in 1998 was 9,405 persons.

The most recent visitor use survey was conducted from June 1992 through May 1993, and was documented in a report dated June 1994. The majority of visitation takes place during the warmer spring, summer, and fall months. Vacationing families predominate during the summer months when schools are not in session, while retired persons are more heavily represented during the spring and fall. School groups are an important component of visitation in the spring and fall. There is significant visitation from the Richmond metropolitan area (about 25 percent); and nearly half of all visitors are from the Commonwealth of Virginia. African-American visitation is a small but growing fraction of the total; the majority of these persons visit the Maggie L. Walker NHS. There is also a small but noticeable percentage of international visitors, with the majority coming from Great Britain, France, and Germany.

Interest in the Civil War is the largest single reason for visitation at this Park. Overall, 59.3 percent of visitors surveyed identified this as a “high” interest, with an additional 35.0 percent identifying this as a “moderate” interest. At the same time, the RNBP is not a “destination” Park. Only 19.7 percent of visitors surveyed indicated that the RNBP was their “primary” destination. The Richmond region was cited as the primary destination by 30.6 percent of respondents, with 14.3 percent noting Williamsburg. Approximately 35 percent of all visitors noted “Other” as their primary trip destination.

Overall, 55.9 percent of visitors had never visited the RNBP before, with 29.1 percent indicating that they had visited the Park “a few times” in the past. However, among local areas residents, only 16.5 percent had never visited the Park before, with 38.1 percent having visited a few times and 45.3 percent indicating that they were frequent visitors to this Park.

It was estimated through the visitor survey that approximately 37.5 percent of visitors spent no more than 30 minutes at a site, about 56.8 percent spent between 30 minutes and two hours, and only about 5.4 percent spent more than two hours visiting the survey site.

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Perhaps the most significant transportation issue facing the RNBP is the widespread geographic distribution of the Park’s units over four separate and distinct political jurisdictions, with many of the units being separated from each other by several miles of urban/suburban development. This requires visitors to undertake a substantial amount of urban and suburban driving. The existing Park tour route requires numerous frequent turns through an environment of high-speed, heavy traffic. Existing tour route signs must compete for the driver’s attention with a myriad of other traffic and advertising signs.

In accessing some Park units, visitors must share what are primarily internal Park roadways with through and commuter traffic. Narrow road surfaces and sharp turns adjacent to earthworks create hazards, especially for tour buses and large recreational vehicles at the Chaffin's Farm/Fort Harrison unit.

There is currently a lack of either public transportation service or privately operated tour services linking the majority of the Park units. While the Park headquarters and the Maggie L. Walker NHS are both served by the local public transportation authority, the Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC), the other Park units all lie outside of the current GRTC service area. Similarly, while Historic Richmond Tours operates a three-and-one-half-hour duration narrated tour of a number of Civil War sites in the Richmond area, including stops at the NPS Visitor Center and the Cold Harbor and Gaines Mill Battlefields, only one trip is operated each day. Tours are offered only Friday to Sunday during the months of April through October. Moreover, the cost of this tour (\$16 for adults and \$13 for students ages six to 18) limits the amount of use.

With the notable exception of the Maggie L. Walker NHS, parking does not seem to be a significant problem at any of the Park's units. However, at the Maggie L. Walker NHS, limited on-street parking areas require that visitors arriving by tour bus (a large percentage of total visitation) must exit their vehicles into an active traffic lane, creating the potential for serious vehicle/pedestrian accidents.

Current visitor informational and directional signing is viewed as being only marginally adequate. The recent initiation of a Civil War Trails signing effort in the Richmond region is viewed by the NPS staff as an important effort to improve this situation. A similar effort that has been initiated at the regional level by the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Virginia Department of Transportation and the City of Richmond to provide a more simplified visitor information signage system on the I-95 and I-64 corridors is also seen as a positive action.

Perhaps the greatest long-term transportation issues facing the Park concern the increases in travel demand on public use Park roadways and associated public roads and streets due to the continuing growth and development of the Richmond region. This concern is particularly apparent in the three suburban counties – Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico – in which the majority of the battlefield units of the Park are located. When the Richmond Battlefield Parks Corporation assembled the original battlefield acreage in 1930, the combined population of these three counties was only 70,000 persons. By 1990, the combined population of the three counties had increased to 490,461 persons. Current projections for the three counties by the year 2020 call for a total combined population of approximately 782,100. This represents a projected increase of approximately 60 percent. Much of this recent development has taken place on the agricultural lands surrounding the battlefields.

3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

As it is for much of the Commonwealth of Virginia, tourism is a major component of the economy of the Richmond metropolitan area. Information obtained from the Virginia Tourism Corporation and the Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau indicate that,

during 1997, total estimated spending by travelers across the state was approximately \$11.2 billion. In the City of Richmond and the Counties of Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico alone, total estimated traveler spending was approximately \$1.0 billion or about 9 percent of the total statewide spending by travelers.

The Virginia Tourism Corporation's 1997 Virginia Visitor Survey determined that the typical visitor group making a pleasure-related trip to the Richmond area spent nearly three days in the area, and spent a total of approximately \$151 per person. A large percentage of these visitors (22.2 percent) were making this trip due to an interest in the Civil War.

The RNBP is clearly a major contributor to visitation in the region. During 1998, for example, the total visitation at the Park of 232,402 persons was about 11.4 percent of the total recorded visitation at all reporting attractions in the region. Visitation at the RNBP trailed only Maymount (400,000), the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (316,878), and the Science Museum of Virginia (266,827) on the list of most visited attractions.

The Richmond region is currently in the process of constructing a new regional visitor information center. To be located at the site of the Civil War era Tredegar Iron Works along the James River adjacent to downtown Richmond, this new consolidated facility is planned to create a new focal point for tourism in the area. Upon completion of this facility, the current NPS Visitor Center is to be relocated from the Chimborazo Hospital site to the new regional visitor's center. This is anticipated by the NPS staff as a way in which to expand the visibility of the Park. The Chimborazo site will be maintained as Park headquarters, and the museum space will be rehabilitated to interpret the story of Confederate medical treatment.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

As noted above, suburban development is continuing throughout the areas of Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico Counties that surround the Park's battlefield units. At Cold Harbor, for example, a recently completed residential development immediately abuts the Park's Visitor Center, with new homes located less than 50 feet from the Park boundary. Achieving an appropriate balance between preservation of the battlefield units and development of surrounding land areas appears to be a major challenge facing this Park.

The preservation of the lands upon which the battles associated with the campaigns of 1862 and 1864-1865 took place is viewed as one of the fundamental management objectives of the NPS at this location. This concern over preservation included both the historic sites and historic scenes within the various Park units themselves, as well as the adjacent lands that form the viewsheds for the battlefields. The NPS staff are working with local agency representatives, particularly in Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico Counties to address these issues.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

By the nature of this facility, recreational activities within the Park are limited. These consist primarily of biking, hiking, and jogging. Picnicking is allowed only in designated areas. The Park's GMP proposes the continuation of this orientation.

■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 Unit Plans

The current GMP for the Park was formally approved on June 7, 1996. There are no plans to update this document in the immediate future.

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

The Park has a generally positive ongoing relationship with all of the surrounding communities and the Commonwealth of Virginia. An expanding relationship is being developed between the NPS and the non-profit Civil War Trails Association, Inc. Created in 1994 using ISTEAD seed money, and with additional funding provided under a TEA-21 grant, Civil War Trails has been very successful in defining a series of integrated driving and biking tours across the state. Each tour route presents an integrated story of a particular campaign during the Civil War. Park staff are working with Civil War Trails on developing improved markings for the routes connecting the Park's units.

In addition to their official duties, local NPS staff regularly participate on a volunteer basis on local planning, zoning and historic commissions.

■ 5.0 Assessment of Need

5.1 Magnitude of Need

Considering the relatively large number of widely dispersed and generally small sites that constitute this Park, it appears that ATS may have only a modest potential to address the transportation and resource conservation issues currently facing the RBNP. There does not appear to be the need for improved internal Park unit circulation for visitors.

However, the potential may exist for ATS to help better link together the various Park units. This could be provided as part of ongoing NPS efforts to interpret the significance of these battlefield sites while possibly reducing on-site parking demands. At the same

time, the market for such a service appears to be somewhat limited due to the time and distance involved.

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5.2 Feasible Alternatives

- An expanded NPS Visitor Center as part of the new regional visitor information center being constructed on the site of the Tredegar Iron Works will be able to provide improved traveler information.
- Collaboration by the NPS with existing public non-profit and private sector tour companies should be pursued to encourage expanded use of these services for day-long tours of the Park units north of the James River.
- In conjunction with the Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau's downtown area shuttle services, improved transit linkages should be established between the Maggie L. Walker NHS, the current RNBV Visitor Center, and the new regional Visitor Center at the Tredegar Iron Works Site.

■ 6.0 Bibliography

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■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

John F. Berry, Jr., President and Chief Operating Officer, Metro Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau, Richmond, Virginia

Will Green, Executive Director, Pamplin Historical Park, Petersburg, Virginia

Brad Hammer, Assistant County Administrator, County of Chesterfield, Chesterfield, Virginia

John H. Hodges, Deputy County Administrator for Community Development, County of Hanover, Hanover Courthouse, Virginia

Diane Miller Linderman, P.E., Interim Director, City of Richmond, Department of Public Works, Richmond, Virginia

David R. Ruth, Chief of Interpretation, Richmond National Battlefield Park and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond, Virginia

Vicki Yates, Manager, Special Projects, Metro Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau, Richmond, Virginia